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Ritual Contingency: Teasing and the Politics of Participation

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Abstract

This article analyzes the naming ceremony of a young girl in a village in southeastern Senegal to show how kola nuts distributed during the course of such rituals provide material channels through which individuals managed inclusion across participation frameworks. Even for those not in attendance, distributed kola co-constituted states of participation and witnessing, in which recipients could subsequently report about such events as ratified authorities. After being excluded from this naming ceremony, a woman performed a teasing nickname of the child to be named, which was subsequently voiced throughout the community as a form of dissent. Such routines of teasing offer forms of value transformation in which individuals could redirect and recontextualize material objects, and in so doing, articulate claims to community inclusion and participation. Lifetime events offer contexts in which increasingly dispersed social networks evaluate participation and community membership. Although teasing has often been offered in general terms as a form of resistance, an interdiscursive, material analysis has the capacity to show how it serves as a form of social power and value transformation.

Introduction

Its face obscured by a long flowing scarf, a stooped figure emerged from beyond a bamboo fence and slowly approached a group of elders standing in the compound of a small village in southeastern Senegal. A young infant in the lineage of the village chief had just been named at a *denabo* (naming ceremony), and hosts had distributed kola nuts to those in attendance. The gift

of these bitter kola nuts was not merely reciprocity, but as I show in this article, co-constituted individuals as witnesses and ratified participants. The cloaked figure's reliance on a long staff betrayed the stride of an elder. In cascading moments of recognition, cries of shock and laughter rebounded inside the small walled compound as the figure drew nigh. Shrugging off any hands that attempted to impede its advance, the cloaked figure thrust the staff into the earth, planted two feet beside it, and bellowed: "the name of this child has come, and it is *Trash Owl*." The compound erupted in a cascade of laughter at this teasing nickname.

This article was inspired by this striking performance that occurred in the aftermath of a naming ceremony (*denabo*) in the Fouta Djallon highlands of southeastern Senegal. A woman named Aissatou had missed out on the naming of her brother's granddaughter. Crossing paths with the village chief and other authorities in the moments after the ceremony, Aissatou disguised herself as an imam and performed a parodic renaming in which she teased the infant, renaming her "Buubu Ñooge" ("Trash Owl"). In so doing, Aissatou was invoking the bird-form that witches adopt at night. In the following days, this name was taken up by women who also felt excluded from the ceremony and had not received a share of kola nuts. Teasing the family of the child with this name subsequently was mobilized in playful extortion in order to contest access to these distributed gifts. These value transformations resulting from the teasing nickname were ultimately remedied through a later gift of kola nuts to Aunt Aissatou who thereby became a ratified witness. As such, these practices show how material objects can mediate participation and witnessing across space and time. Analyzing the exchange of such objects alongside the verbal performances through which such objects acquire semiotic value offers tools for examining the constitution of community and participation in contexts of increased mobility.

This article thus examines routines of teasing and exchange through which West Africans mediate the distribution of goods and in so doing, negotiate social relations amid increasingly dispersed communities. Across West Africa, the exchange of gift objects such as kola nuts offers ways of extending out and negotiating access to participant frameworks beyond a limited phenomenal field. Early analyses of gift exchange were concerned with the ways in which circulated gifts could expand one's personhood across time and space. In his analysis of the Māori notion of the *hau* of the gift, for example, Marcel Mauss observed that gifts may contain elements of one's personhood, which in a certain sense, sought to return to previous owners (Mauss 1925). In Malinowski's analysis of the Kula, the successful exchange of Kula objects

circulated one's name through the region, in what Nancy Munn referred to as the cultivation of fame (Munn 1986).

However, gifts such as kola, and through them names, persons, and states of witnessing, were susceptible to rerouting and recontextualization as negotiated through routines of verbal creativity such as teasing. While kola often began as commodities and were often purchased based on their uniformity, ritual oration and subsequent performances showed them to be a nexus of value transformations in which they could link together particular people, places, and participation frameworks. Through performative encounters like the one that introduces this article, those at the sidelines of community rituals negotiated access to such objects, thereby achieving the ability to speak as ratified participants. This episode thus builds on scholarship in linguistic anthropology that has expanded participation roles and interaction beyond the limited here and now of the phenomenal field (Irvine 1996; Hanks 1996). I suggest the viewing participation as constructed alongside the circulation of material goods and as expanded through routines of teasing offers tools for analyzing dispersed social networks in contexts of rapid mobility.

Routines of teasing are practices through which West Africans experienced and represented mobility—tales of failed trips to Europe, the mispronunciation of learned trade languages, or teasing tirades that guilted family members into returning home for lifetime events. These experiences occurred across diffused social networks composed of kin and colleagues who are increasingly spread out over hometowns, economic centers, and an international diaspora (Akyeampong 2000; Kane 2011; Yount-André 2018). Within this context, peripatetic individuals managed social networks via phone calls, regular visits from returning migrants, and the exchange of gifts (McIntosh 2010). Tracking these mobilities and connections entails not only the analysis of cell phones, Facebook, or Western Union, but also the management of lifecycle rituals where individuals managed their status and influence within the community. This article thus poses questions of how individuals account for, represent, or stand in for one another as a way to manage social relations across these mobile networks.

Participation, Teasing, and Materiality

Building on scholarship on participant frameworks and the semiotic transformation of value, this article contributes to understandings of how individuals expand or contract their

influence across space and time, thereby negotiating their inclusion into dispersed communities. Firstly, this article builds upon work on participant frameworks, providing tools for analyzing participation beyond the here and now of interaction. Attempts to expand notions of participation in contexts of face-to-face interaction were pioneered by Erving Goffman, who offered a useful framework for examining participation beyond the limited dyad of the speaker-hearer (Goffman 1981; Goffman 1990). In so doing, Goffman examined forms of overhearing, eavesdropping, and forms of attunement during face-to-face interactions that accounted for different modalities of participation. An attention to interdiscursivity has shown that participation roles in face-to-face interaction are not merely limited to the field of phenomenal perception. Irvine, for instance, in what she calls *shadow conversations*, shows how the production of particular utterances can anticipate future audiences (Irvine 1996). Other scholars of comedy such as Antti Lindfors have pointed to the capacity of teasing and insults to become embedded in subsequent interactions: "stand-up comics can count on their insults and sarcastic jabs for reaching their intended targets far beyond ongoing interaction" (Lindfors 2019). Although it is possible to offer useful analytical distinctions at the outset (Levinson 1988), participant roles are culturally defined and emerge in interaction. For example, deities, ancestors, or other entities beyond the phenomenal field may be drawn into ritual interlocutors as participants (Hanks 1996).

The case of West Africa demonstrates that such states of witnessing may be extended and negotiated through the exchange of gift objects. As I describe throughout this article, ritual kola distributed to ritual attendees marked those present as witnesses, but could also be subsequently used to extend participation to those who were not ostensibly present. The circulation of such gifts entails the embedded semiotics of space, personhood, or time. For instance, Mauss insightfully drew on Māori conceptions of *hau* to capture goods and persons within the same distributive frame (Mauss 1925). While Mauss conceived of *hau* as embedding the spirit of persons within gifts, this article further shows how participation and witnessing may be passed on and established through the exchange of material objects. These objects, in turn, are themselves subject to contingent circulations and implicated in value transformations through creative routines of verbal creativity such as teasing.

This article is grounded in scholarship in linguistic anthropology that emphasizes the materiality of language over a semiotics of virtual representation inherited from Saussurian linguistics (Irvine 1989; Keane 1997; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012). In this way, the exchange

of utterances or greetings can usefully be analyzed alongside the exchange of material gifts as physical substances that can be exchanged or rendered equivalent (Irvine 1989). Once produced, material semiotic forms such as words, gestures, and objects alike are subject to everyday forces which impact possibilities of representation (Keane 1997). These material forces may wear down semiotic forms and make them ineffective, or instead imbue them with particular values through interdiscursive circulation. In the case of the Kula ring, associations acquired by objects in the form of keen trades, influential owners, or epic journeys layered objects with increasingly dense and momentous histories to the point where they might acquire names (Malinowski 1984; Munn 1986). Whereas objects such as kola nuts could be transformed to encapsulate particular ritual participant frameworks, once circulated, these objects were susceptible to capture and rerouting through routines of teasing and subsequent framing talk.

This article thus builds upon other work in semiotic anthropology that examines how the qualiae of objects (Munn 1986) and indexicalities acquired through exchange facilitate articulations across other times and spaces—what Nancy Munn has called intersubjective spacetime (Munn 1986). Viewing the constitution of participation through talk and objects necessitates an analytic perspective that cuts across seemingly distinct semiotic forms. In *The Fame of Gawa*, for instance, Munn engages in analyses of value transformation that eschews the logic of separate, segmented domains, viewing instead witchcraft alongside other forms of exchange:

> The approach [is] to avoid this kind of segmentation by developing a model of a more general transformative process entailed in different sociocultural practices or actions, of which transmitting or exchanging and bewitching may be instances, in a given case. (Munn 1986).

Munn viewed the mediation of positive and negative values as types of transformative action through which communities mediated value essential to community viability. Various exchange practices from food hospitality exchange to Kula exchanges carried different potentials for expanding an individual's intersubjective space-time as relations beyond the self.

Routines of teasing[1] provide a useful point of departure for examining the value transformations and reframing of ritual encounters from the periphery. Achieving interdiscursivity through memorable entextualized poetics, teasing could often honor praise and

positive evaluation while at the same time subverting it. This article draws increased attention to the interdiscursive circulations of performed teasing, highlighting ways in which individuals may influence the circulation of goods, persons, and their place within participant frameworks. As embodied by Yaaye Aissatou and other women of Taabe, teasing presented a capillary form of social action through which they were able to negotiate their position within a community ritual. On Gawa, for instance, Munn describes practices of teasing in which ritual participants "reminded" those who might have refused to repay debts and in so doing inhibited dancing that saturated ongoing ritual exchanges with vitality (Munn 1986:204). Across West Africa, teasing likewise provided a highly productive way of prodding individuals or reminding them of social responsibilities—strategies which were particularly useful in communities spread out across space. Rather than positing teasing as a form of resistance in a vague sense (Powell and Paton 1988), I propose an approach that analyzes value transformation and interdiscursivity as a way to track mediations between people, places and participation frameworks.

This article thus examines creative representations of the ritual context, paying particular attention to processes of interdiscursivity in teasing performances. As with the analysis of stance, for instance, the emergence of a successful tease was a form of social action that could emerge progressively over the course of several encounters (Lempert 2008; Irvine 2009). Although past approaches to teasing are wide-ranging (see for example Pawluk 1989; Keltner et al. 2001; Queen 2005; Hay 2000; Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006), teasing[1] has often been understood to entail a critical element towards a present party accompanied by metalinguistic signs of the "non-serious" or "playful" (Schnurr and Chan 2011). Much of this work analyzes teasing in terms of relational or identity work, as in solidarity-building between participants (Hay 2000), and often emphasizes the interactional ambiguity of teasing expressed as bonding and biting (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997).

The perspective of teasing talk has important implications for the analysis of contingent social action beyond the central stage where over-hearers, late arrivals, and talk around the edges of social situations may recontextualize ritual action. Teasing also affords a perspective on how individuals may subvert values. This may happen by representing success as failure through mockery or by influencing social questions in jest that actors may otherwise not be ratified to address. Routines of teasing thus underscore the indeterminacy of formal features by often

mimicking deference and praise. Employed during naming ceremonies, teasing emerged as a strategy for articulating broader claims to distributed ritual goods and through them, to ratified positions within ritual participant frameworks. Much of the work of teasing can thus be to articulate (often refutable) connections between ostensibly distinct people, places, and objects, as entextualized through memorable performances.

Structural analyses of teasing (e.g. in terms of a joking relationship), often viewed in teasing the expression of categorical relationships between corporate groups (Radcliffe-Brown 1940). However, an attention to specific interactional dynamics and their subsequent interdiscursive trajectories shows that mere categorical explanations of teasing utterances do not exhaust their analysis. For instance, analyses of teasing in the tradition of Conversation Analysis (CA) have looked to its organization in practice rather than assuming functions based on the structural positions of actors. Looking closely at the organization of responses and their sequentiality, Drew notes, "If teasing has a social control function, it is interactionally, not structurally generated" (Drew 1987:250). As with Irvine's analysis, the establishment of a tease and its subsequent relational implications is negotiated interactionally and is not merely interpretable through formal features (Irvine 1992). That is, the status of tease, insult, or praise cannot be known from formal features alone, but from interactional effects. In this case, offering an alternative nickname became taken up as a tease and was translated into the politics of participation as articulated through the circulation of kola.

The *Denabo* of Bébé Aissa

The *denabo* of Bébé Aissa took place in Taabe, a small village in the foothills of the Fouta Djallon mountains in southeastern Senegal. Aissa's father, Rune, was a nephew to the chief, and her mother was in the lineage of Taabe's imam. In predominately Pular-speaking villages along the Guinean border, a *denabo*[2] (naming ceremony) brings into relation the local kin of a child's father, *takanɓe* (hosts), and their in-laws, *futuuɓe*[3]. Together they witness a ritual shaving ceremony during which a child is given a name and through this name, becomes a person. The arrival of in-law groups was keenly anticipated and news of their progress was frequently discussed. Travel was difficult in these borderlands between Senegal and Guinea where the steep mountain roads of the northern reaches of the Fouta Djallon mountains made auto travel near impossible.

In a region with spotty network and difficult travel conditions, accounting for distant relatives as well as alerting kin and neighbors across the region and further afield set the scene for a social drama that underlay the *denabo*. Arriving from surrounding villages and neighborhoods, guest carried on their heads calabash gourds filled with gifts of peanuts, oil, wax, and soap. *Takanɓe* were careful to offer return gifts to departing *fuutuuɓe* that were not of the same kind and quantity. *Takanɓe* male elders often made such decisions in secretive negotiations inside huts (*gundagol*) as waves of in-law groups arrived and departed, thereby plotting the best ways to reciprocate with gifts of money and kola.

A central concern for village chiefs and ritual organizers in rural areas like Taabe was to ensure a fair distribution of ritual objects like kola nuts. Residents were concerned with providing enough gifts and food since these redistributive rituals were centers of social gravity that brought together faraway friends and relatives. Days after naming rituals, weddings, or funerals, attendees reflected upon ritual events on the basis of the gifts and food they received. Those events that were held to be successful and good (*weelugol*) were ones in which attendees felt well compensated and had eaten well.

As part of this concern for hosting a successful event grounded in plentiful food and gifts, the distribution of kola nuts at naming ceremonies was keenly monitored. Certain organizers often felt intensely responsible for making sure that appropriate parties got their fair share. These elders had to make calculations about how to appropriately distribute in such a way that those who received gifts would account for non-present dependents. This was particularly evident in communities such as Taabe where at any given time, many of its residents were dispersed in pursuit of seasonal work and trade. While those in attendance often had a claim to distributed gifts, those performing the distribution (*sendugol*) always had an eye on those individuals who were not present and needed to be accounted for. As such, the distribution of gifts like kola not only functioned as a form of reciprocation for those present at community rituals, but also could extend participation to those who might not have been originally present at the ritual action.

For instance, at another naming ceremony weeks before, kola nuts were put aside and entrusted to a third party, to be given to the imam at a later date. Not only deference or distribution, the gift of kola provided a material channel that could integrate those "absent" into ratified participation. These kola nuts subsequently followed along intermediaries, from those present at the original naming ceremony, to the imam's wife, and ultimately on to the imam

himself. As such, they provided a material sign of his ratification as a witness for the naming ritual. Reports of what happened during the naming rituals travelled alongside the kola nuts, thereby positioning the imam as an individual who could authoritatively talk about the naming ceremony. In the days after the event, the imam invoked the chosen name and remarked on the occasion as a ratified witness instead of asking others for news of the event. In this way, kola in exchange across time and space can be seen as a mediator of participant frameworks, bringing in and including individuals beyond the otherwise limited here and now of ritual action. In other contexts, the expansion of participant frameworks through material mediators enhanced blessings by multiplying "witnessing" participants. For example, I once observed the blessing of a newly-built house by a neighborhood community that was concerned about bad omens during the construction. The owners had brought along a sack, whose contents were subsequently passed on from household to household, implicating more and more individuals in this benefactive act.

The Ritual Shaving

During the ritual shaving in which Rune's newborn girl was to acquire a name, dozens of men and women crowded in anticipation, sitting on mats or standing on the outskirts. Seating arrangements were a process of ongoing negotiation, with prime locations and seats being reserved for honored guests and in-laws. Amid an audience that sat in a semi-circle around the *ngeru* (ritual space), some participants embodied the roles of playful suitors who teased each other, the newborn, or her family regarding marriage prospects. Some older adult men jokingly remarked on the baby's beauty, wondering if they would have a chance to marry her. "Meneŋ ko paykuŋ meŋ faalaa," ("We want the little girl [as a wife]") one man belted out to Rune's brother, Mamadou.

Participants thus often tested their hosts in order to gain more access to goods or to gain entry into the important conversations. Only moments before Aissa's shaving, several elder men from Taabe made searching comments to Rune's elder brother, Mamadou, thereby reminding him of their expected share of kola nuts.

Table 1

Effectively parried by Mamadou, this exchange demonstrates the host's critical verbal skill of pushing these kinds of pointed requests into the future while not disrespectfully foreclosing them

prematurely (see Table 1). Teasing in these contexts provided a way of imagining possible futures. These small exchanges before the naming event hint at how gifted kola nuts were constitutive of witnessing this ritual event. Offering a share of kola was not merely to engage in ongoing social relations between two corporate groups. To receive kola during such an event also meant that one had witnessed it and could authoritatively report on it.

While the name of the baby was chosen over the course of discussions between elders before the ceremony, the imam announced the name of the newborn after its ritual shaving. Facing east with a wooden pole in his two hands, he began with an Arabic blessing[4] and declared the name of the child to be "Aissatou" in successive rounds of oration.

Pular/Arabic: (*Arabic in italics*, Pular in standard font[5])

Bismillahi al rahmani al rahimi
Allah humma salli ala sayydina Muhammad wa sallim
Allah humma salli ala sayydina Muhammad wa sallim
Allah humma salli ala sayydina Muhammad wa sallim
Innde boobo no seeni ɗo yumma makko e ɓeŋ makko ko [ ] inni mo ko Aissatou
Innde boobo no seeni ɗo yumma makko e ɓeŋ makko ko [ ] inni mo ko Aissatou
Ko ɗuŋ windino ka alluwal Allahu
Yo alla wurnumo barkina

English Translation:

In the name of God, the gracious and the compassionate
O Allah, send blessings on our master Muhammad
O Allah, send blessings on our master Muhammad
O Allah, send blessings on our master Muhammad
The name of the child has come here, her mother and her father have named her Aissatou
The name of the child has come here, her mother and her father have named her Aissatou
This is what was written on the tablet of Allah
May God grant her blessings

As the imam concluded, several members of the father's family pressed small bills into the hands of the imam in a recognition of his ritual labor. Rune's elder brother began to hand out

kola nuts to those attendees closest to him, and soon kola nuts filtered their way through the grasping hands of those in attendance until all present had received a share.

Just after the naming ceremony had been concluded, however, Rune's paternal aunt (*yaaye*), Aissatou, rushed into the compound where the naming had just occurred. Coming in from another direction, she had arrived late and carried a small calabash filled with an assortment of old junk—broken flip flops, shattered pieces of an old radio, and a dirty sock—offerings to satirize the gifts of rice, cloth, and oil that were brought in by Rune's in-laws.[6] Busy with the preparation of her gifts, she had missed out on the shaving and the distribution of kola nuts and biscuits. Indeed, even though she lived just on the other side of town, no one had alerted nor fetched her in time.

As the younger sister of the village chief and maternal aunt (*yaaye*) to bébé Aissa's father, Aissatou was, in theory, an important member of the *takanɓe* hosts. Although Aissatou surely knew that the shaving and naming ceremonies would not have had a definite starting time, the fact that they had gone ahead without her presence was striking. Her absence was significant since she not only shared given names with baby Aissatou, but was furthermore considered a namesake. Called *tokora* in Pular, having a namesake is a special bond that is often broadly invoked and remarked upon. Newborns are often named after respected individuals in the family lineage, often a grandfather or grandmother (*maamiraawo*) as a way to connect new generations with forbearers.

In recent months, however, Aissatou had been participating in a regional trade network of *fonio*, a local grain that was increasingly becoming a cash crop instead of being domestically consumed. Aissatou's husband was a respected farmer and Aissatou had been visiting regional markets and those in the regional capital. Increasingly, a flourishing gold mining economy and the construction of a new international highway provided opportunities for aspiring traders. Being included in such lifetime events was a central concern for those like Aissatou who often traveled throughout the region. On the part of guests, the roll call of those who made it back to hometowns for such events was intensely anticipated. Likewise, hosts were scrutinized for the status of their invitations, spread through word of mouth, telephone, and text, across capillary social networks. During naming rituals and other ceremonies, absent relatives would manage their involvement through return visits, telephone calls, familial representatives, and gifts. Many such events were put on hold so that certain key members living at a distance might be able to

attend.

Just after the main naming event, a first wave of attendees of the naming ritual streamed back through a nearby compound where much of the cooking had been taking place. It is here that I and several hosts ran into Aunt Aissatou and Maty[7], the first wife of the village chief. Maty emerges as an instigator and as an ally to Aunt Aissatou, and in the following exchange is the first to suggest the teasing name, Buubu Ñooge, one which Aissatou adopts and performs in subsequent encounters.

Table 2

Intercepting the village chief as he came through the compound, Aunt Aissatou demanded to know if they had named the child already, "eey ko ka argol ngol nii kaa oŋ innii?" ("is it on the way in that you did the naming?") (line 8). "Men innaali taw" ("We haven't [her] named yet"), Aissatou continued, voicing her and Maty's imagined role in the naming ceremony. At this point, Aissatou is already voicing one who has the authority to name the infant, a role that she will develop more later as she and Maty press their case. The chief's response indicates that he hears Aissatou's comments as protesting the fact that she had not received her fair share of kola nuts: "Ah lanni hino geɓal moŋ ngal ka innde moŋ," ("You already got your share, in your name [Aissatou]").

As Aissatou first learned of her exclusion, she and Maty accounted for their late arrival by saying "ah meŋ ɗaarike haa meŋ ronki" ("we waited until we got tired"), referring to her and Aissatou's unsuccessful attempt to wait around to receive kola nuts after the ritual naming. This phrase is repeated several times between Aissatou and Maty almost word for word as they voice their combined frustrations.

Table 3

During this period of palpable frustration, Maty first proposes on line 15 a teasing name for baby Aissa, calling her Buubu Ñooge (Trash Owl), a charge that she casually repeats on lines 18 and 21. *Buubu* refers to an owl (*buubuuru*) a reviled bird, which often presents the animal form of flying witches. *Ñooge* means rubbish or trash[8].

A first attempt to rename Bébé Aissa occurs on line 15, where Maty's use of the imperfective aspect constitutes a first instance of naming "…inn*a* mo…," (-a). Having already

attempted to posit this name in public interaction, she can later refer back to it in the perfective aspect "… meŋ inn*i* mo…" (-*i*)[9] (on line 17).

Table 4

The ritual elders, however, are not drawn into a response by this attempt at renaming and continue to provide a defense for Aissatou's exclusion. The response of another Taabe elder draws attention to the site of the shaving (*ngeru nguŋ*) as having been accessible to all (line 22). His use of proxemic deictics on line 22, "no ndaygi ***ɗoo***" ("it is all lit up **here**" in the sense, "it is in plain view") reinforces his claims of the naming ceremony being an open affair. The village chief insists that the gifts of sugar biscuits, rice cakes, and most importantly kola nuts had already all been given out to those in attendance. Aissatou soon leaves, appearing frustrated with her exclusion from the main naming event.

A Teasing Reenactment

The following encounter picks up at the opening scene of this article with the cloaked figure of Aunt Aissatou. Only minutes after Maty and Aissatou had teased Bébé Aissa, Aunt Aissatou returns to the scene. This time, she is bedecked in long headscarf in the style of a devout elder and is holding the very staff that had been used in Aissa's naming ceremony. Her arrival upon the scene ignites laughter and cries of surprise among those standing by. Planting first her feet and then the ritual staff into the gravel courtyard, Aissatou lifts her head from underneath the flowing scarf and, facing east, recites blessings of the prophet. She bellows out this oration over and over again as over-hearers protest, laugh, and half-heartedly attempt to stop her.

While the imam's original blessing had been performed in a quick, almost methodical recitation in which the boundaries between phrases were nearly imperceptible, Aissatou's performance drew emphasis to parts of the text by her pausing frequently and extending the final vowels in emphasis (e.g. "sall**i:m**"). In contrast to the imam's previous incantation, whose tight cluster of linguistic blessings appeared impenetrable to response or contestation, Aunt Aissatou's recitation was interspersed with calls to stop, protestations, and not infrequently with laughter.

Table 5

This embodied inhabitation of the figure of the imam—achieved through staff, scarf and posture along with mastery of the honorific Pular and Arabic blessings—went well beyond the casual reference to Buubu Ñooge some moments before (see previously on line 15). Drawing on Goffman's wry terminology, Aissatou had now *created a scene,* (Goffman 1990), performing an over-the-top reenactment that offered a provocative alternative name for bébé Aissa. This was a scene in every sense. This was not only an interruption of the ritual action through a teasing performance, but also an encircled performative space forged around her by an attending audience. Aissatou's reenactment of the previous naming ceremony elicited both raucous laughter and admonishment from those present. Between bouts of laughter, the men successively called for her to be stopped and playfully grabbed for her. In spite of the protests, Aunt Aissatou remained in character and repeated key parts of the text over the exhortations and shrieks of her audience.

The name Buubu Ñooge became a popular topic of conversation in the village of Taabe for days to come. Its utterance came to stand for dissatisfaction and a call for an increased share of kola nuts distributed after the official naming. Referring to Buubu Ñooge as opposed to Aissa, in effect, indexed a particular stance in relation to the host family's distribution of kola nuts (Du Bois 2007). For some time, Aunt Aissatou only referred to baby Aissa as Buubu Ñooge and performed the name in front of Rune, the baby's father, "mi andaa mo [Aissa]…miŋ ko Buubu Ñooge mi andi" ("I don't know Aissa; me, I know about Trash Bird"). Her utterances were often accompanied by negative evaluations of the *denabo*, during which Aissatou and some other women hadn't received their fair share. Uttering "Buubu Ñooge" interdiscursively harkened back to Aissatou's original moment of dissent in getting passed over. Rather than overt challenges to their status within ritual hierarchies, these teasing voices provided useful tools for individuals to test the limits of participation and inclusion.[10]

As the teasing name began to spread throughout the village in subsequent interactions, it soon became a rallying cry for Aunt Aissatou and other women who felt they too had been passed over during the naming ceremony. Saturated with indexicalities of dissent, Buubu Ñooge could be performed through linguistic devices that allowed individuals to voice the name at the same time that they eschewed responsibility. This is comparable to other examples in Senegal in which the pleasant poetics of *xaxaar* insult poetry allowed utterers to eschew any personal responsibility (Irvine 1992). The day after the naming ceremony, a local woman referred to the

renaming, “a yi'ii hanki ɓe innno mo kadi **woo** innde wonde.” (“You see yesterday they had named her another name **it is said**”). By using the quotative marker, *woo* to create distance between her voice and the actions of another, the woman could invoke Aissatou’s irreverence without personally claiming to be the source of this information. Articulating the dissatisfaction with their involvement in such terms offered a political strategy that did not require a highly conspicuous organizing by women across the village.

Aunt Aissatou’s teasing reinterpretations were not only about claiming a greater share of rice, or kola, but also about claiming a ratified role for herself at the *denabo* of her namesake, bébé Aissatou. As I have argued, to be given a kola nut was co-constitutive of witnessing the baptismal moment. Without gifts of kola to ratify their participation in the official naming event, Aissatou and other disenfranchised parties picked up on and disseminated Buubu Ñooge in order to rectify the exclusion. Eventually, these days of onomastic extortion paid off. In the evening of the day after the naming ceremony, I asked the village chief about bébé Aissa, and he told me that the name had finally been removed: “They were given kola; they were given corn, they were given rice, they were given soap. Now it’s bébé Aissa. Now they forgot the trash part. That was taken off there now; we got rid of that now.” I visited Aunt Aissatou soon thereafter and found her content with the resolution and never again heard mention of the name Buubu Ñooge.

The encounters described in this article took place while conducting twenty months of ethnographic field work in southeastern Senegal. Having previously lived and worked in Kedougou City as a Peace Corps volunteer and study abroad educator, I began spending time in the village of Taabe after becoming close friends with Mamadou, the elder brother of bébé Aissa’s father. I conducted research not only in this village, but followed the movements of what I found to be increasingly mobile residents of a region undergoing significant social and economic change. In a certain sense, my methodologies are based upon a critique of the speech event as the locus for linguistic anthropological analyses. Not only interested in the event itself, I endeavored to stay attuned to things taking place before “events” began, and long after they ended. While it was very easy to capture face-to-face interactions within neatly formed participant frameworks around a kettle of *attaya* (tea), I found that some of the most important encounters occurred as individuals met along intersecting routes, or in the heated discussions that followed after individuals returned home from an event. Subsequently tracking its interdiscursive pathways later required follow up ethnography that attended not only to ritual organizers and

elders, but also those who had been excluded and those who occupied liminal positions.

The Stakes of Distribution

The efficacy and success of ritual performances does not rest solely in the hands of ritual specialists. Rather, they are contingent upon the materiality of semiotic signs, potential failures or breakdowns, and subsequent reframing by participants and overhearers (Keane 1997). Participants may be late, performances may fail, and unratified individuals may break into participation frameworks. This happens not only in the immediacy of interaction, but in subsequent encounters along chains of interdiscursivity. At stake are the inclusion of individuals as ratified participants and how participation is mediated beyond the here and now of face-to-face interaction. The openness of participant frameworks—conceived of as potential over-hearers (Goffman 1981), shadow conversations (Irvine 1996), or in this case through the exchange of kola as vehicles of presence, reveals the ever-present possibility of symbolic hijacking and dissident teasing from the sidelines.

The emergence of rural villages as ritual anchors that are regularly visited by itinerant migrants renders analyses of inclusion in community rituals all the more significant (Piot 1999; Kane 2011; Whitaker 2017; Whitehouse 2012). I suggest that the diffused residence of kin, colleagues, and neighbors across regional economic centers has increased the stakes of distribution in ritual ceremonies. Across Africa and much of the world, villages like Taabe have become points of origin for cyclical rural migrations in which many residents spend part of the year in regional economic centers. As such, these villages have become ritual and communal centers of gravity through which increasingly mobile individuals negotiate involvements with one another. For decades now, villagers in Taabe have perceived a collapse in the social life of the village, with fewer youth remaining amid the draw of work in Dakar, in gold mining areas (*diouras*), as well as in the Gambian border area. While a naming ritual might appear to happen in a contained village, it provides an important site through which individuals measured, maintained, and built relationships in dispersed networks. Within this context, Aunt Aissatou was forced to balance her involvement in local trade networks with her participation in community rituals.

Teasing was used more broadly as a way to reveal the stakes or to prompt others to insist upon the value of social ties. Given the levels of in and out migration from rural zones across

Africa, teasing provides a perspective on how individuals weave themselves back into and prompt others to place themselves within natal communities. The pragmatics of guilt could be a terribly effective way of insisting on social bonds. After longer periods of absence, I often heard individuals beseeching errant friends and family by uttering: "a hawki aŋ" ("you cast me aside" or "you threw me away"). Bébé Aissa's brother, Mamadou—who left the village for long periods of time—was often teased about not being from the village, a charge he often had to counter with highly-scrutinized repartees. Arriving in Taabe after a long period of absence, Rune's brother Mamadou, who was often away from the village working as a tourist guide, often had to parry these tongue-in-cheek accusations of being a stranger and no longer having business in Taabe: "aŋ a jeyaaka doo" ("you, you're not from here"). These everyday forms of teasing formed a linguistic web of playful entrapment that was spun across casual exchanges by individuals coming in and out of Taabe.

One's participation in lifetime events was marked not only through bodily presence, but also through the giving and receiving of objects such as kola. Distributed during such moments, they held the potential to mediate broader social relations in space and time. It is through their circulation that participants viewed their participation in events, and how they understood them to be successful. In short, to witness the baptismal moment of name giving is not a straightforward matter of hearing. Rather, it is semiotically mediated through configurations of signs, which constitute a state of ratification and participation. While as analysts we may have frameworks for understanding participation, being a witness, participant, or overhearer all demand an explanation of the semiotic modalities through which local actors construct them. Distributed to witnesses just after the naming of bébé Aissa, gifts of kola thus mediated a person's ability to report on an event, to be a ratified authority on a *denabo*. Rather than simply assuming co-presence to be coterminous with participation, this episode provides a reminder that ratified participation is negotiated through material, linguistic configurations well after an event itself.

Aissatou's successful performance of teasing managed to spread the name Buubu Ñooge and through it, her demands for participation through the materiality of kola. In so doing, Aissatou managed to imbue the name with multiple competing values. In this part of West Africa, demeaning language also protected individuals and objects by rendering them unremarkable or "degraded". For instance, remarking on an infant's ugliness was widely

considered a way of keeping away witches or jealous gazes (e.g. the evil eye). To tease a person or object was to engage in a delicate game of simultaneously rendering public and taking objects out of circulation. Marking something as ugly or worthless thus protected it from jealous gazes and insulated it from desire. While in-laws often commented on a girl's beauty[11] in a tongue-in-cheek marriage proposal, close kin often pointed out how ugly the infant was. "Oo ɗoo ko totiiru" ("This one here is a mongoose"), Aissa's grandmother exclaimed when she first saw her. Such performances allowed Aunt Aissatou to both protect the child by likening it to trash at the same time that she lands a biting tease through calls of witchcraft (buubu).[12]

In addition to kola nuts[13] distributed during the course of naming ceremonies, other forms of exchange in West Africa provide evidence of a spatial mediations that embed individuals into other participant frameworks and spacetimes. More broadly across Senegal and West Africa, it was common practice to offer return gifts (*neldaari*) to family and friends upon one's return. While often analyzed in terms of remittances from migrants abroad, these gifts were not merely a source of economic support or of building one's reputation, but also an important way in which returning migrants rendered real and available these distant places for their kin back home. As such, it was important that these gifts be from and carry indexicalities of these distant places. Just as to receive kola at a life event was to become ratified as a witness who could speak authoritatively of particular events, to receive gifts as part of such travels was to be linked with particular places in important ways. As one market seller once explained to me, if you don't bring something back from one's travels, it's like you were never there.

Conclusion

Drawing on an encounter in the aftermath of a naming ceremony, this article tracked how the interdiscursive life of a dissident tease offered the possibility of contesting exclusion from a naming ceremony. Performed in the aftermath of the ceremony, Aissatou's performative renaming drew attention to itself by charging the nickname, Buubu Ñooge, with dissident indexicalities and linked these to the distribution of kola nuts. This teasing performance thereby drew attention to kola nuts as material objects that had the capacity to extend and convert participation beyond the here and now. Gift giving in such contexts entails is not only a form of status negotiation, but also a way to navigate one's participation within a dispersed community. Negotiating access to participation frameworks through objects, however, also renders them

susceptible to redirection, where they may acquire new semiotic values through routines of verbal creativity such as teasing.

Objects are commonly used to expand the bounds of interaction. The distribution of salt to entire neighborhoods after the blessing of a house could imbue ritual linguistic acts with increased efficacy through the expansion of witnesses. More broadly, being a successful and known was often predicated upon one's capacity to share and spread one's influence through gifts of hospitality and patronage. Value in gift objects thus emerges as the capacity to spread names, people, and oratory to a vast social body, which may be focused in individual acts ritual oratory. In the case of Bébé Aissa, distributed kola functioned partly to disseminate the name and to facilitate its movement along interdiscursive pathways, a process that Aunt Aissatou's nickname subsequently disrupted.

As objects whose value often resided in their uniformity, kola nuts occupied a status in between commodities and gifts that approached commodification. Distributed during such ritual occasions, kola could circulate more quickly than people could, and thus could be used to stand in for and extend the participation of individuals beyond the here and now. Within these economies of circulation, routines of teasing as performed by women like Aissatou redirected these circulated goods and through them, their place within the community. These performances of teasing were not only a question of face and identity work, but spilled out onto objects, names, and bodies. Insofar as many of these dissident voices were women, such routines of teasing provided them with possibilities of cultivating capillary power and of being heard in contexts where their voices were not always accounted for.

Participation frameworks as theorized by Erving Goffman provided important work in deconstructing taken for granted notions of participation in face-to-face interactions. His approaches were very useful in examining interaction, what he considered to be a domain in its own right (Goffman 1983). An ongoing challenge, however, has been to link together such interaction to broader encounters, performances, and utterances. The analysis of indexicality, deictics, and interdiscursivity have provided useful tools in capturing how interlocutors do this work. This article contributes perspectives that bridge these types of analyses. Forms of attunement and the monitoring of involvement thus occur not only in the immediacy in face-to-face interaction through eye gaze, footing, and bodily posture (Sidnell 2014), but also through the circulation of material objects such as kola, through which participation and ratification is

mediated.

Particularly in the contexts of increased mobility, individuals find novel ways of capturing attention and embedding one another in ongoing social action across dispersed social sites. Whereas analyses of reported speech or he-said-she-said gossip show processes of layering in which voices are framed and laminated, the circulation of kola shows that linguistic elements may furthermore be laminated in material semiotic forms. This article therefore calls for an attention to an expanded semiotics of involvement and insulation through which individuals protect themselves from and also facilitate access to sociality through the materiality of the built environment.

This article furthermore contributes to analyses of teasing as a form of social action. Although teasing has often been posited as a weapon of the weak in the form of social critique, tracking such processes requires not only an attention to initial utterances in face-to-face encounters, but necessitates ongoing analyses of the interdiscursive aftermath. Teasing, in particular, often carries the potential for expanded interdiscursive pathways (Lindfors 2019), which in this case permitted Aunt Aissatou to expand her intersubjective time-space in the form of participation ratification. The effectiveness and success of teasing performances matters, since it was subsequent interdiscursive voicing and not merely the form of the initial tease that struck its target. Aissatou's successful teasing thus demonstrates how material objects that often extend participation could be diverted through verbal creativity and entangled in competing trajectories. In this sense, teasing was predicated on expectations of futurity—an ongoing verbal duel to be settled at a future date, an expectation of a gift or compensation, or an attempt to ensure that one's future trajectories would be intertwined with a dense web of sociality.

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Tables

Table 1 – *"I haven't seen anything yet"*

1.	Elder	Alaa ko yi'ii mi taw	I haven't seen anything yet
2.	Mamadou	Eh alaa ko yi'uɗaa	Eh you haven't seen anything
3.	Elder	Eeyo	Yes
4.	Mamadou	No wata hawju ko e fuɗɗade woni	Don't be in a hurry, we're just getting started

Table 2 – "*We Didn't Get a Chance to Name Yet"*

AD = Yaaye Aissatou; BD = Mamadou Diallo, Rune's older brother; SD = Rune's uncle and chief of the village

6	AD	kori oŋ fini	did you sleep well?
7	BD	eeyo m-	yes w-
8	AD	eeyo ko argol ngol nii kaa oŋ innii	so is it on the way in that you did the naming?
9	SD	eeyo eh	yes eh
10	AD	meneŋ meŋ innaali taw	we didn't get a chance to name yet
11	SD	ah lanni hino gebal moŋ ngal ka innde moŋ	ah it's over, you got your share here in your name

Table 3 – "*We Named Her Trash Owl"*

MA = Maty; AD = Yaaye Aissatou; UH = a village elder; SD = the village chief

12	MA	ah meŋ ɗaarike haa meŋ ronki	ah we stood around there until we got tired
13		((group laughter))	
14	AD	oŋ ɗaarike haa oŋ ronki	you stood around there until you got tired
15	MA	meŋ ɗaarike haa meŋ ronki meŋ inna **buubu ñooge**	we stood around until we got tired we call her **trash owl**
16	AD	ko ha'no ko ha'no ɗaaroɗoŋ innoŋ biɗɗo oŋ	why didn't you wait to name the child
17	MA	meŋ inni mo **Buubu Ñooge**	we named her **Trash Owl**
18	MA	hay gooto fentaali nde innde ko **Buubu Ñooge** wi'ata mi	no one will undo this name, it's **Trash Owl** I say
19	UH	he:	hey
20	AD	awa gasi ko	ok that's that
21	MA	ko **Buubu Ñooge**	it's **Trash Owl**
22	UH	he ka o innaama ɗoŋ ngeru nguŋ fow hande no ndaygi ɗoo	there where she was named today it was in plain sight
23	AD	ngeru nguŋ fow no ɗaygi onoŋ hiɗoŋ ɗaari hiɗoŋ-	the courtyard was illuminated, but you all you are standing you are-

24	SD	biskiti e kilo goro e coɓɓe modʃuŋ toŋ fow no rawni feŋ fewndo ɗo	cookies, a kilo of kola nuts and rice cakes were all here

Table 4 – *"Perfecting" a Casual Naming*

Line 15				
meŋ	ɗaar-ike	haa	meŋ	ronk-i
3PL.EX	stood-REFL.PFV	until	3PL.EX	tired-PFV
"we stood around until we got tired"				
meŋ	inn-**a**	buubu	ñooge	
3PL.EX	call-**IMPERF**	owl	trash	
"we call her trash owl"				
Line 17				
meŋ	inn-**i**	mo	buubu	ñooge
3PL.EX	call-**PFV**	SG.DO	owl	trash
"we called her trash owl"				

Table 5 – *A Performative Renaming*

MD = Mamadou (Rune's older brother); SD = the village chief; GD = a friend and neighbor of Rune and Mamadou; AD = Aunt Aissatou

48	MD	eh eh no- no-	eh eh no no
49	AD	Allah huma salli al a seydina: mohammad wa salli:m	((recites blessings on the master))
50	SD	hey he:	hey hey
51	GD	nangee ɓe taw nangee ɓe taw doŋ	grab her already grab her there
52	SD	a yi'ii onoŋ wana godʃuŋ faaledoŋ oŋ wi'ay	you see if it's something you want you speak
53	MD	nangee	grab

54	AD	((continues)) ...Mohseeniammad wa salli:m	((continues blessings of the master))
55	MD	uh uh accee ɗuŋ ɗoo de	eh eh stop that there
56	GD	nangee ɓe ɗoŋ taw	grab her there already
57	AD	innde boobo no seeni ɗoo:	the name of the child has come here
58	AD	ko Buubu Ñooge	it is Trash Owl
59		((laughter))	
60	SD	innde boobo no seeni ɗoo ko Aissa o wi'ete	the name of the child has come here, her name is Aissa
61	SD	ko Aissa o wi'ete	her name is Aissa
62	AD	o'o o	nope
63	SD	ko Aissa o wi'ete	her name is Aissa
64	AD	boobo no seeni ɗoo ko buubu ñooge o innetee	a child has come here she is called Trash Owl

Notes

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[1] This article therefore refers to these forms as teasing as opposed to joking. While joking and teasing provide overlapping analytical terms that can be difficult to disentangle, many have distinguished joking as performances during which a target is not present whereas teasing as those in which the target is present (Keltner et al. 2001). This article thus builds upon other work which has expanded notions of participant frameworks beyond the here and now, in which speakers not merely in the immediate phenomenal field may be included. One consequence of this article is that purported distinctions between teasing and joking do not offer particularly

useful tools for analyzing verbal creativity if the teased target is often interpreted through (often ambiguous) histories of association that can implicate those present or absent through semiotic links and translate targets across names, objects, and individuals.

[2] The naming ritual (*denabo*) examined in this article represents at topic of anthropological analysis in this region. I came across a decades-old analysis of a *denabo* in the Bande region in Kedougou, only a dozen kilometers from the village in which this current research occurred. This description of a denabo presents the moment of oration and shaving as the central ritual encounter, during which the appropriate kin are present to integrate this child into the community through its naming:

"On the eighth day after birth, the father of the infant offers *coobal*, corn or rice flour with honey, to the family of his wife (the *esiraaɓe*), to the elders of the village, to the imam, and feeds these individuals who are the witnesses of the public ceremony. The women, maternal and paternal aunts of the infant, grandmothers, stay in the hut where the infant is shaved. … The infant is presented with a white cloth by a young girl who enters the hut three times, followed by her mother and her sister…" (Dupire 1963:239)

[3] Although *futuube* was the term for one's in-law as a corporate group, the term *esiraaɓe* was also employed. Although the term *esiraaɓe* refers primarily to the father and mother of one's spouse (i.e. elder relatives), it could also on occasion come to mean in-laws in a corporate sense.

[4] This text is a traditional "blessings on the master," commonly cited throughout West Africa. Originating from 33:56 in the Qur'an, God and his angels send blessings upon the prophet: "oh you who believe, greet him in peace." This invocation is particularly efficacious since blessings offered in this way are multiplied by ten, given that they originate from God's station. Many thanks to Rudolph Ware for these insights.

[5] Although I distinguish between Pular and Arabic in this ritual text, in many cases Arabic was understood not merely as a separate language, but as an extension of an honorific replacement register of Pulafuuta. That is, Arabic blessings and verses from the Qur'an were often uttered as the most respectful, potent forms of honorification in Pulafuuta.

[6] Ironically, her intention to tease the host family with mock gifts is what made her late for the ritual in the first place.

[7] The village chief's first wife, Maty, had been in attendance for the naming, but like Aunt Aissatou, missed out on the post-naming gifts.

[8] Poetically, however, Buubu has the feel of a nickname that you might hear in this part of West Africa. For instance, it sounds like the nickname Dudu, which is a shortened form of the extremely common given name Mamadou (or Amoudou, Mamoudou).

[9] In contrast to many other languages that mark tense, Pulafuuta foregrounds aspect (i.e. perfective or imperfective).

[10] Aunt Aissatou was particularly well suited to evade personal responsibility for her teasing as she could also have grounded her joking in terms of *tanagol*, the practice of generational joking between grandparents and grandchildren. In the past, structural approaches to joking relationships have often tracked how categorical relations render relationships of license and teasing intelligible and have considered such institutions as contributing to social cohesion (Radcliffe-Brown 1940; Radcliffe-Brown 1949). Yet noting a systematic relationship between social categories does not exhaust an analysis, but only provides a field of play upon which actors later build tropes and expand. In a critique of structuralist analyses of joking relations, for instance, Douglas argued that anthropologists "treated joking rituals as if they arise

spontaneously from social situations and as if the anthropologists' sole task was to classify the relations involved…" (Douglas 1975:90). To simply stop at such a relation would be to take for granted a static social structure that could be modeled through a classification of joking practices.

[11] Derman notes that while jocularity often accompanied young girls' naming ceremonies, male infants' occasions were more somber (Derman 1969). I noted jocularity in the naming ceremonies of both young girls and boys.

[12] Extending participation and witnessing through the exchange of material objects was not limited to this encounter, but figured importantly in many other contexts in mobile communities. In West Africa more broadly, offering return gifts (*neldaari*) upon one's return from travels and gifts of kola could embed others into ostensibly distant places and participation frameworks. This was a strong feature of a teasing routine called *jammoore* (pl. *jammooje*) in Pular in which a taboo name was linked to a memorable folly, as encapsulated by a term like *France* that hearkened back to the site of misfortune. Common among itinerant male merchants of Kedougou's downtown market, they would often tease each other with particular nicknames that invoked a spectacularly unsuccessful economic venture or another debacle. Those present at the baptismal event were thus ratified to use them as their originators. Any individual who was not present at these baptismal moments, however, could gain access to taboo nicknames by paying a fine, an in-kind good distributed to the referent and those in attendance. To pay such a fine was, in effect, to become a ratified member of this original encounter. Often paid in the form of coins and kola nuts, these objects provided semiotic vehicles through which individuals were made to count in the original baptismal moment of folly that grounded a *jammoore* nickname. This example of avoidance naming might be compared with the case of the Korowai, for whom the "one time event" names formed during mutual activities constituted a form of relation-making (Stasch 2011). This case provides another example of how inclusion in a baptismal event and through it, ratification to utter a taboo name, could be extended through the materiality of money or goods such as kola nuts.

[13] A story related to me by Mamadou further explicates the role of kola nuts and participation frameworks. He once told me of a group of tourists who brought along kola nuts as gifts for the residents of the villages they would pass through on their trek. Serving as a guide, Mamadou soon became extremely frustrated with them as they insisted on giving kola nuts to their local interlocutors *in exchange* for information, interviews, or pictures. As Mamadou explained, they misunderstood the nature of the kola nuts, which functioned to *establish* a proper communicative channel, rather than to reward them for particular interactions. This episode further shows ways in which kola nuts can be viewed not only as an exchange object, but as objects that constitute ratified forms of participation.